

## **Media Advisory – April 25, 2008**

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### **County expands program for vulnerable preschoolers**

Snohomish County will expand a free preschool program geared toward helping children of low-income families succeed in public school.

An additional \$1.1 million in state funding will allow 160 more children to participate in the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), bringing total participation to nearly 1,000 students countywide. The program also offers advice and assistance to the children's parents by connecting them with various family resources.

Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon discussed the program expansion Thursday with members of the ECEAP Policy and Advisory Council during the group's annual recognition dinner.

"The earlier we ready children and families for school, the more successful they will be, which overall benefits them as individuals but also this community," Reardon said. "These are the workers, leaders and decision-makers of tomorrow, so we have a responsibility to be sure they're prepared."

ECEAP specifically is designed to help children – ages three to five – prepare for success in the public school system and to assist families with their child's development.

Children's services include educational experiences such as language skills, self-help activities, social skills, self-esteem building, field trips and preparation for kindergarten. Children also receive vision, hearing, medical and dental screenings as well as nutritious meals. Services are provided in school districts, nonprofit agencies, community colleges and within local tribes.

Family support includes parent education, information about local assistance resources, family activities and help with decision-making.

"The benefit of the program is the multitude of services that are offered," said Cindy Hart, the county's interim Human Services director. "Not only do the children receive something, but we're also able to work with the parents."

The increased funding will be combined with the current operating grant from the state of \$5.3 million.

The additional money will allow the county to expand programs housed at Everett Community College, Everett School District, Lake Stevens School District, Marysville

School District and Volunteers of America in Everett. Volunteers of America also will begin a new program in Sultan, replacing the Head Start services that were removed from the community a few years ago.

With this new expansion and an increase approved in 2007, the ECEAP program has grown by 283 children – a nearly 42 percent increase overall.

For more information on the program, go to [snoco.org](http://snoco.org) and search “ECEAP,” or call Joe Varano at 425-388-7251.

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